

Jun/Jul 2017

# W O R L D F R E E P R E S S

## Be safe & get story

SAFETY for journalists in hostile environments – and how journalists can and should look out for each other – was the theme of May's London Freelance Branch meeting. We heard from freelance TV journalist Sue Turton and also from Vaughan Smith of the Frontline Club ([www.london-freelance.org/fl/1706vaug.html](http://www.london-freelance.org/fl/1706vaug.html)).

Sue Turton's work has included reporting for Al Jazeera from Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria. She gave her own example of "what happens when things go badly wrong" in Egypt. She arrived there soon after the 2013 coup, when most journalists were "going in on holiday visas." One Al Jazeera crew was already in detention, with a producer put through a mock execution.

After a raid on Al Jazeera's bureau, Sue's team "went dark", with unnamed correspondents presenting stories by phone or appearing "without your face". They weren't then aware how much "every single thing we were doing was being closely monitored" by secret police "getting into lifts with us".

Four days after Sue left Egypt, her colleagues Peter Greste, Mohamed Fahmy and Baher Mohamed were arrested and detained. In total nine were charged with aiding and abetting a terrorist organisation – five, including Sue, in absentia. They were "tried and convicted with very little evidence that made sense... we got 10 years." Peter, Mohamed and Baher were jailed.

William Hague, who Sue had "known of old from Channel Four news" was then UK Foreign Secretary and condemned the charges. But Sue believes "it was our fellow journalists who made the differ-

ence... people like you" who "gave us airtime, space on their websites – even our competitors."

A source in government told Sue that President Abdel al-Sisi was sick of the bad publicity. There was, she was told, a conflict between the Interior Ministry and the Presidency over the case. Sisi changed the law to allow Peter to continue his sentence (supposedly) in Australia; two others were retried and pardoned.

The terrorism conviction meant Sue had to stop working for Al Jazeera. It's still unsafe for her to travel to states with extradition treaties with Egypt – the Emirates and most African Union countries. A former colleague from Egypt was held on arrival in Germany while they considered whether to hand him over.

Sue described "the difference between a freelance and a staffer when covering conflict" in terms of the support they can expect. The news

channels "won't let you go without hazardous situations training," without you learning the protocols: "Where is the nearest field hospital, where is your tourniquet? What is your blood group?" Sue "has been to so many places where there have been freelances where there is no protocol, 'we've taken them on and done their protocols for them.'"

The pressure has to be on the person who is commissioning to look after the freelance. More and more, they aren't doing that: "Put pressure on those employers to do the same."

Now there's a "new front line that's called the White House" and new precautions journalists have to consider, especially around email. Sue noted, "I've got friends in the White House pack... they're not walking away... We're all on notice now – fake news, alternative facts, working out how to counter these."

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Sue Turton reflects on Vaughan Smith's presentation (reported online)

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## A manifesto for journalism

ON 13 SEPTEMBER 2016, Mark Menzies, Conservative MP for Fylde, during a Digital Economy Bill debate, said, "I urge the Government... to ensure that at no future point could the BBC's editorial independence be infringed". Menzies revealed the prompt for his intervention – he was lobbied by a constituent.

Whatever one thinks of the UK's electoral system, each of us is represented by a Member of Parliament beholden to consider representations from all constituents. If government policy impacts on your life, it's worth making your case to your MP, or candidates in the election on 8 June. Based on our democratically-endorsed campaigning positions,

here is my stab at an NUJ manifesto for the General Election.

**1** A questioning interest in the veracity of information should be woven into the national curriculum.

**2** The NUJ lobbied hard over the Investigatory Powers Act, seeking additional protections for journalistic material. Judicial oversight of applications to see journalists' phone data is vital to protect our sources.

**3** A review of the Official Secrets Act is considering a proposal for dramatic increases in prison sentences for offenders. Seek commitments from potential MPs that they would oppose such measures.

**4** Local media face desperate travails. A Parliamentary enquiry

into the future of local news would focus the minds of the conglomerates that play fast and lose with long-established titles, also providing the opportunity to consider more radical options such as local news surcharges on internet giants.

**5** The NUJ has long called for the repeal of restrictive trades union legislation. Conservative cabinet member David Davis MP described the pernicious Trade Unions Act 2015 requirement to appoint picket marshals as a "Franco-style policy".

**6** There's a change in attitude to freelances and the self-employed. The Government's "Taylor Review" will be published soon. It could form

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### LFB meetings

**Mon 12 Jun**  
Fighting tax and NI woes and winning

**Mon 10 Jul**  
How did journalism manage to cover the election, then?

See back page &  
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